

CAHS

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**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Governor's Budget Proposal – Department of Social Services, Commission on Children
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Deputy Director
Connecticut Association for Human Services
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Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Maggie Adair, Deputy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a 100-year-old statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and to engage, equip, and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future.

Faced with yet another year of a significant budget shortfall and larger deficits in the out years, policymakers must make difficult decisions. CAHS urges Governor Rell and state legislators to take the long view on budget priorities and preserve the integrity of programs and policies that support children, families, and the well-being of the state. We ask you to take a balanced approach that not only looks at spending cuts, but also at looks at the revenue side, particularly tax expenditures that have not been re-examined in years. It is lopsided to each year review spending line-items and ignore an estimated \$5 billion in tax expenditures – some that may be very useful and others that may be huge giveaways with no economic benefit to the state.

Tonight, as in so many years before, people are coming to Hartford to testify about short-sighted budget cuts that are balanced disproportionately on the backs of low-income children and families, the elderly, frail and disabled. Some say that we need to make government smaller, “shrink the beast,” and cut wasteful spending. CAHS agrees that the state should cut wasteful spending and eliminate duplicative services. However, we do not consider providing eye glasses to our poorest residents as waste. Nor do we think providing 4,000 youths with the opportunity to work during the summer as fluff. Nor do we think that dramatically cutting child care subsidies to low-wage parents is an economically wise move.

The Governor thinks otherwise. And we don't agree with her.

In a recession as deep as this one, we all know that more and more families struggle and the need for services increase. We have heard from families who have never asked for support now finding themselves unemployed and going to food pantries to feed their children and asking for heating assistance to keep their children warm. **Now is not the time for Connecticut to abandon people – more than ever, it is time to ensure that Connecticut's residents are housed, fed, clothed, and safe – and ready to rebound when the economy recovers.**

CAHS is concerned about a number of cuts proposed in the Governor's budget, including health care, child care, safety net services, homelessness and housing services, transportation services, halving the Children's Trust Fund, and eliminating the Commission on Children.

- As a result of **increasing co-pays and premiums** for HUSKY adults, **eliminating most over-the-counter drugs** for HUSKY adults, and **eliminating medical transportation** to individuals on SAGA, people will not seek the health care they need to remain healthy. They will end up getting sicker and cost the state more long-term.
- **Restricting vision coverage under HUSKY and ending vision coverage under SAGA** will possibly deny the ability for people to properly see, function, and manage every-day tasks.
- Cutting the **Care 4 Kids child care subsidy program** by a startling \$11.5 million and closing the program to low-wage parents is an unwise economic move. The last thing we want to do in an economic downturn is deny child care financial support to parents who are lucky enough to land a job. Cutting the Care 4 Kids program from this year's authorized amount of \$103.5 million down to about \$84 million in FY11 hurts children, parents, providers, and the economy. CAHS is submitting separate, more detailed testimony on this issue.
- Eliminating the **Commission on Children** would be a great loss to children and families. CAHS has worked closely with the Commission on Children on several issues, so we are familiar with its ability to bring real results through policy change. The Commission: develops smart, results-driven policy; brings in federal and philanthropic dollars to the state; conducts research on children's needs; and empower parents to become community leaders. The Commission has played a role in key policies over the years in the areas of early childhood education, food stamp training and employment program, adoption reform, prevention, child poverty, and health. This year, the Commission is providing valuable staffing to the **Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession**. We cannot lose the passion, expertise, and results that the Commission on Children provides to the state of Connecticut.
- Cutting the **Children's Trust Fund** in half is also a foolhardy move. Programs operated under the Children's Trust Fund are highly regarded, particularly the ground-breaking Nurturing Families Network program. The Governor proposes to significantly cut the Nurturing Families Network program, defund the Parent Trust Fund and Children's Law Center, and cut Empowerment Programs, Kinship and Respite, and Help Me Grow by 30 percent. All of these programs help keep parents and children healthy and safe.

Thank you for giving CAHS the opportunity to testify about our concerns with the Governor's attempt to close the budget deficit, much too largely on the backs of vulnerable citizens and the working poor.

We cannot only rely on further spending cuts. We need a balanced approach that addresses the state's structural revenue problem with a revenue solution. Specifically, we urge you to support the revenue options proposed by the **Better Choices for Connecticut** coalition, including closing corporate tax loopholes, evaluating corporate tax breaks to see whether CT is actually getting an economic return on its investment, delaying reductions in the estate tax that would benefit only very wealthy persons, and increasing income taxes on households most able to pay.

We urge you to consider revenue options as you craft a budget solution, keeping in mind the need to avoid hurting the state's most vulnerable people and the state's economy through unwise spending cuts.